

TUBERCULIN SKIN TESTING FOR SUSPECTED TB

TB Fact Sheet Series

Tuberculin skin testing is important for patients with suspected but unconfirmed tuberculosis (TB). In recent years, more than one third of such patients in Wisconsin have had no record of a tuberculin skin test (TST). The Mantoux-method TST --the tine test is not acceptable--can be extremely helpful in increasing or decreasing the index of suspicion in patients with suspected tuberculosis. The Mantoux test should be given using a needle and syringe to inject 0.1 ml of 5 tuberculin units intradermally into the forearm. Of course, a negative TST does not rule out active disease, and a positive test is more likely to indicate dormant TB infection than active TB disease. Nevertheless, the TST remains an extremely useful diagnostic tool that is all too often neglected.

A test is always worth performing when tuberculosis is suspected. Although the TST may sometimes be falsely negative in patients infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and other immunocompromised individuals, even patients with very low CD4+ T-lymphocyte counts may have a positive skin test result. For patients with a smear that is positive for acid-fast bacilli, a TST may be helpful in the event that the culture does not become positive.

Hospital admission is an optimal time to perform TST screening. When the TST is administered upon admission, it can be administered and read by trained staff. If the TST is positive, the patient can be assessed for TB infection or disease. However, a screening program should only be undertaken when realistic plans for initiating and completing preventive therapy are in place.

Screening is appropriate for patients with any of the following conditions that increase the risk of active TB disease:

- HIV infection, immunosuppressive or corticosteroid therapy
- Diabetes mellitus, silicosis, renal disease, leukemia, lymphoma, cancers of the head and neck, metastatic cancer
- Rapid weight loss, or being 10% or more below ideal body weight
- Social risk factors for tuberculosis, such as alcohol or drug use

For more information about tuberculin skin testing, contact the TB program at (608) 266-9692.